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Cowan teacher finds creative ways to teach life lessons

Stacey Shannon

For the last 12 years, Mike Evans has been teaching technology to students at Cowan Junior/Senior High School. His classes are far from old-fashioned "shop" classes. His students can be found designing hovercrafts, building bridges, putting up walls, making videos with special effects and much more.

Evans gets to know each class of students in his construction, transportation, manufacturing, technology and other classes. He also teaches seventh- and eighth-grade technology classes -- all in one small space in the school.

Space is one of Evans's biggest challenges. He said his students have been great about walking around other class's projects and leaving them alone. Working with a small budget, small space and big plans gets a little tricky sometimes.

"You can't buy more space," Evans said. "Besides, we here at Cowan think we already have the best tool we can have -- our minds!"

He said his students learn to apply what is available for their projects, which makes them work at problem-solving in ways other schools may not have to.

Budgetary issues almost completely cut Evans's program this school year. Thanks to some last-minute funding, his doors stayed open. He hopes the same is true for the 2006-07 school year but knows nothing is definite.

Students taking Evans's classes have a variety of career goals. He said some are undecided, but a former student is now studying architecture at Ball State, one has become a mechanical engineer and others go on for further training and education at Ivy Tech. Most of all, Evans wants to teach students life lessons.

"I want them to know that they have the power to determine the definition of success in their life," he said. "I want them to know that they can overcome the adversity that will surely come. ... I also want them to respect the contributions of all people and not just a few."

Evans fits in all these lessons through varying his classes. Students do book work, but they also work on numerous projects, reports, videos and Internet activities.

Most of all, Evans likes seeing students learn, likes seeing them realize they can do something they had thought impossible.

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